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ABSTRACT

This practicum was designed to involve senior citizen volunteers in the schools on a regular basis. Implemented in a suburban public school setting, the project involved: (1) the dissemination of information about senior citizen involvement to school district staff; (2) the development of a partnership between a regional senior volunteer program and the school district; (3) the matching of school district needs with senior citizen volunteer interests; and (4) the development of a Living History project, in which students interviewed participating senior citizens about their experiences during World War II. At the end of the project the middle school held a Living History Day, during which students presented historical papers based upon their interviews and library research to fellow students and the senior citizens. Although the original goal of the project, to have senior citizens participate regularly in the educational process, was not met because many had initially refused to participate due to past negative experiences with senior citizen-student undertakings, the successful Living History Day can be seen as a first phase of a senior citizen volunteer plan. Follow-up surveys of the senior citizens involved showed that they thought the project worthwhile. Eleven appendixes provide copies of various forms, letters, and survey questionnaires used in the practicum. (MDM)

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Increasing Senior Volunteerism In a K-8 Public School District

ED 366 421

by

Vanessa C. Phelan

Cluster 43

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A Practicum I Report presented
to the Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

NOVA UNIVERSITY
1992

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PRACTICUM APPROVAL

This practicum took place as described.

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Date: November 23, 1992

This practicum report was submitted by Vanessa C. Phelan under the direction of the advisor listed below. It was submitted to the Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova University.

Approved:

April 15, 1993
Date of Final Approval of Report

Allen Fisher
Allen Fisher, Ph.D.
Adviser

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This author would like to express her gratitude to all those involved in the effort to "bring to life" an idea that had been discussed for many years. Many thanks go to the Special Services staff in the school district who consistently supported the concept. Appreciation is also extended to the seniors themselves, and their interactions with our students, without whom this project's success would have been nonexistent.

Personal thanks are extended to the author's husband, Don, who respected the time and effort that needed to be put into the preparation, implementation and final analysis of this plan.

To my advisor, Dr. Allen Fisher, this author extends her appreciation for his guidance and support through the course of this project.

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ABSTRACT

Increasing Senior Volunteerism in a K-8 Public School District. Phelan, Vanessa C., 1992: Practicum Report, Nova University, Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies. Inservice Training/Elementary/Middle School Education/Community Partnerships/Administrative Support Systems

This practicum was designed to formally organize an effort to involve senior volunteers in the schools on a regular basis so that they would feel that they were important and valued participants in educational systems for young children as well as middle grade students.

The writer disseminated information, both in writing as well as verbally, about the advantages of senior participation with students and educational programs; recruited senior volunteers; developed a partnership with a regional senior volunteer program; matched a district needs assessment with senior volunteer interests; and completed a project where seniors were an integral component of an interdisciplinary unit at a Middle School. A formal sequence of activities for developing a senior volunteer program was prepared and used as a part of this project.

Analysis of the data revealed that initial recruitment efforts for seniors are very difficult when past volunteering experiences have been negative. However, the data also supported the research in that when seniors' desires and expertise are identified and matched with the needs of staff who are willing to form such a partnership, results for seniors, staff and students are positive and serve to form a firm foundation for future collaborative efforts.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Description of Work Setting and Community

The work setting for this project is a suburban public school setting, encompassing preschool through Grade 8, located in a town outside of the largest city in the state. There are approximately 1250 students in the school district. About 600 high school students are tuitioned to area high schools, since the district per se does not have its own facilities for Grades 9 through 12. The community is considered socioeconomically to be middle, upper middle class; of course, there are a few exceptions and some families are said to live "on the other side of the tracks." International Business Machines is one of the major employers in the area; approximately fifty families are being relocated to the area from the Monassis, Virginia plant within the next several months. The IBM manufacturing plant is located in the village adjoining the school district, although some of its offices are in the town proper.

The population is a cross-section of several groups. First, there are the students in all grades, preschool through Grade 8, including those who might be considered gifted and talented as well as those with handicaps and disabilities. All students are heterogeneously grouped in classes, with a continuum of support services to assist students based on any need identified. The staff include all those who are paid workers in the school in any capacity, including classroom teachers, instructional or program assistants, lunchroom workers, administrators and custodians, to mention a few. The population involved also includes the community, made up of parents of the children who attend our schools as well as other taxpayers who do not have children going to school, either because they are older, younger or living with an ex-spouse. Included within this latter group as well are those who do not have children at all.

Writer's Work Setting and Role

The writer is the Director of Instructional Programs for the school district. She is responsible for all programs for students in Special Education and supplemental services that are mandated by either Federal, State or local regulation or policy, preschool through Grade 12 as well as coordination of professional development activities district-wide, development of mini-grants and incentives for program improvement and curriculum development. The current proposal to initiate a senior volunteer program in the

district is a part of a plan to look creatively at all areas in order to utilize resources that are currently not being used and consequently to improve the effectiveness of programming efforts for students. As well, it is an effort to begin the process of forming a continuum of partnerships between the school district and community members.

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CHAPTER II

PROBLEM DESCRIPTION

Historically, the community in the school district has been very supportive of the quality of education and consequent funding to support that quality. A philosophical vision for the school district known as the Design for Education was developed fifteen years ago by a committee made up of parents, teachers and community members. This Design was revisited two years ago in order to insure that our "vision" for what our students' needs for the future was consistent with societal, familial, technological and, of course, educational changes. The Design was then reworked in order to expand upon what the collaborative committee discussed would be necessary for the children to be successful and productive members of society.

At the same time, unfortunately, economic difficulties were beginning to be seen and felt by the community. In a town where the mean average salary was and continues to be one of the highest in the state, jobs were lost and income was reduced. In addition, the state aid formula was being altered and the result was a significant loss to the school

district. As a result, a part of the community, including a large number of senior citizens who were retired and on fixed incomes, became more involved in budget discussions in order to defeat the budget since taxes continued to increase. It became evident that their involvement was due to their own personal economic and financial needs. They had minimal understanding about the complexities of state aid to education and its relation to the district's revenues. Perhaps even more importantly, they were unaware of the changing needs of families, profiles of children and the consequent addition of alternative educational programs to support those needs. Their perceptions were oftentimes based on knowledge that was old or incorrect, since they did not have any direct involvement in the day-to-day activities and instruction in the schools. Previous to this, administration and staff did not either take the time or feel it may have been necessary to involve seniors in school programs.

Retired or senior citizens (that is, persons fifty years of age or older) are neither seen nor do they participate in the schools except during special occasions, such as Grandparents' Day or classroom plays. It is evident that seniors attend school only when they are invited for special occasions, specifically regarding activities in which their grandchildren may be participating. Even though these seniors may attend a few school functions during the course of the year, their participation is as guests; they

do not participate in the day to day activities with children or staff, nor are they made a part of direct instructional activities.

Seniors have valuable experiences, assets and knowledge that can be a part of the formal educational experience for students; this resource is not being utilized in the schools at the present time. The town has two senior centers; when called to ask their total membership, they stated that it ranged between 50 and 60 members who are actively and regularly involved but that over 100 seniors have been involved in one or more activities over the last year. In addition, there is a Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) in the region whose members actively volunteer time to human service organizations and community activities.

Clearly, it is evident that there are many senior or retired citizens in the community who are available to volunteer in the schools but who are not active participants in this effort.

Problem Documentation

As a general rule, volunteers are an integral part of our school system, and are seen and used as valuable resources for the students. However, our volunteers are, for the most part, parents of children who are attending our schools, or college students volunteering time for coursework and/or practicum teaching requirements. Senior citizens are not participating members of this group of

volunteers. When 28 teachers or 25% of the professional staff in the district were surveyed randomly and verbally as to whether they currently were utilizing senior volunteers or had in the last two years, none responded affirmatively. When further questioned as to whether they felt this was a problem that needed to be addressed, 25 responded affirmatively: most (23 of those answering affirmatively) added that they felt that recent budget defeats were resulting in decreased paid staff and resources for students and that seniors' participation in the schools might assist in insuring that resources were available for student support, when needed.

The lack of seniors' participation in the school district is further documented through observations, formal review of volunteer lists and teacher letters to parents as well as interviews. On ten separate occasions during the Spring and Fall of 1991, the writer walked through each of the three schools, directing her observations toward the Learning Centers, teacher workrooms and designated classrooms where teachers utilize volunteers most often. On six of those occasions, there was no evidence of any senior volunteer participation. During four of those observations, volunteers were observed, however, none were above the approximate age of fifty.

In addition, during the Spring of 1991, volunteer luncheons were held at two of the schools. With the exception of the paid staff and administration, there was

nobody in attendance over the approximate age of 50. As well, during a volunteer training that was held at the lower elementary school on September 24, 1991, there were no volunteers in attendance over the approximate age of 50. When more direct inquiry occurred as to whether there was an effort made to recruit seniors in this effort, the resulting information confirmed that there was no formal recruitment effort made for this population.

Volunteer lists were also reviewed, one list from each of the three buildings in the district. All on the lists were identified as parents of children who attended school in a particular building. A review was also made of ten randomly selected letters sent home to parents of students in Grades Kindergarten through Grade 5, where classroom teachers specifically asked the parents to indicate if they were interested in volunteering for field trips, being class mothers or fathers or to assist in fund raising. Not one of these letters sent home indicated the desire or request for the assistance of a grandparent who might be willing or interested in the volunteering.

On a more informal basis, during four weekly building based meetings between this writer and the Special Services staff, the need for and use of instructional assistants for special needs children were discussed. At each of these meetings, staff initiated discussion about the desire for senior volunteers to assist in this capacity to a degree, recognizing that there was no effort being done at the

present time. In addition, during three separate interviews with colleagues to discuss the role of older citizens within the educational system, all agreed that seniors are currently not directly involved in any capacity in our school district. At the same time, however, all involved in the interviews felt that this should change.

Causative Analysis

There appear to be several causes for the fact that senior volunteers are not a part of this school system. It is clear that because financial resources have been abundant in the past, paid staff have been available as resources to assist in individualizing instruction for children. It is also evident that there is no one person who has coordinated an effort to investigate, recruit, match needs with desires and train seniors or retired volunteers. As well, individuals asking for volunteers have not made the commitment to be directly involved in the training efforts for these potential volunteers. Some have also expressed the fear that seniors may make value judgments on what is happening in the schools since it is very different from the seniors' experiences when they themselves attended school. Unfortunately, two retired gentlemen in the community have also been very outspoken against the school budget; therefore, some staff have made generalizations and have stated that they do not want these particular gentlemen (or those like these individuals) directly involved in any school activity. Finally, there are some who fear that

senior or retired volunteers may have a particular expertise in one or more areas, and that if they should volunteer their time, those individuals may jeopardize positions currently held by paid staff.

Relationship of the Problem to the Literature

A review of the literature shows Chambre (1987), Biegel, Shore and Gordon (1984) and Moody (1988) discussing the need and advantages of using senior volunteers in education. The fact that adults over the age of 65 represent the fastest growing segment of the population in the United States is significant; tapping this resource through volunteerism offers these individuals an opportunity to channel knowledge, energy and productivity back into the mainstream of society (Kouri, 1990). There are reasons cited, unfortunately, as to why seniors have been used minimally as a part of the volunteer effort in public school systems. The elderly population are often neglected by society; Kouri (1990) states that older Americans lack a well-defined societal role. Therefore, social systems such as ours may not even consider the use of retirees as volunteers, since their general worth is looked upon as minimal (Cull & Hardy, 1973). Some continue to believe that older people are senile and therefore useless (Browne and Onzuka-Anderson, 1985) or that they are inflexible and loners (Butler, 1975). Job (1984) states that many view older people as incapable of learning or teaching. Others stereotype them as unalert, close minded and unproductive

citizens (Tenenbaum, 1979). The retired population often represents an increasing burden rather than an asset from a societal point of view (Kouri, 1990).

On the other hand, Dobelstein and Johnson (1985) state that volunteer work and community service for older persons is very desirable and appropriate. Seniors have the capacity and breadth of experience to serve as an inspiration to young people (Hallowell, 1985); as well, oftentimes seniors have skills and experiences that can be used within the instructional programming efforts for specific age groups, according to Miller and Wilmhurst (1975). Intergenerational cultural programs that are developed serve to bridge the gap between young and old (Moody, 1988). Tobin (1985) feels that seniors can gain a great deal of emotional strength and security by giving their time and knowledge to others; a positive impact on self-esteem and social relationships is experienced by retirees who have volunteered their time (Palmore, Burchett, Fillenbaum, Wallman, 1985). As well as improving the quality of life for themselves, retired people can also improve community and school relations through their volunteer efforts (Lewis, 1978).

The literature identifies several causes for the lack of senior volunteerism in schools. Some have felt that volunteers, senior or otherwise, have questionable motives and may take the jobs of professionals or paraprofessionals

(Isley & Niemi, 1981). According to Naylor (1967), minimal training for senior volunteers have also impacted on the effective use of their abilities within the schools and with students. Although lifelong learning is a recognized part of our society at present, the fact that seniors are no longer paid members of our workforce may indicate that they represent a more subordinate role in our society (Kouri, 1990). Some staff fear that volunteers are not reliable since they are not paid for their efforts (Taranto & Johnson, 1984). An antagonistic reaction from employers to seniors can also be a major obstacle to implementation and the operations of a volunteer program (Brudney, 1990). Some organizations have failed in their use of volunteers since initial planning was not done to "match" the needs of a particular department with the desires of the senior volunteer (Kouri, 1990). Fisk (1986) alleges that our society has disengaged the elder population from economic, social and familial activities, including their involvement through a volunteer effort. There is undoubtedly a great deal of prerequisite planning, education and coordination that is necessary to establish a successful senior volunteer program (Krout, 1989).

CHAPTER III

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS

Goals and Expectations

The goal of this project was that there would be more direct evidence of senior volunteers participating proactively in the schools within the district regularly. Through a planned and coordinated effort to involve seniors more directly in the schools, it was hoped that they would feel that they are important and valued participants in the current educational system. It was projected that participating staff would also recognize the importance of the seniors' expertise and experiences in relation to instructional efforts for students.

Expected Outcomes

The expected outcomes for implementing a senior volunteer program in the school district were multiple. It was hoped that seniors would be observed volunteering in the schools on at least five separate occasions by the end of the project's initiation. When the school district's volunteer luncheon was coordinated and held, it was

projected that at least 15 individuals over the age of 50 would be seen as a part of this group. Teachers who had been involved with senior volunteers as a part of the project would share information about their classes' experiences in the form of a classroom or newsletter home. They would then ask for seniors at home to participate in the volunteer effort in the district in order for the project to continue.

Measurement of Outcomes

Staff who had had seniors volunteering with them would be identified as participants in the project; these numbers would be compared with total numbers of professional staff in the district as well as with numbers who had used senior volunteers in the past. They would also be asked to complete an evaluation survey about their level of satisfaction based on a Leiter scale index (Appendix E). The index itself would ask participants to assess the initial phases of the senior volunteer effort as well as the match of the senior volunteers with the identified need and/or person with whom the vounteer was placed. The choices on the index would range from "most satisfied" to "not satisfied." In addition, suggestions for improvement of the project in the future would be requested. It was hoped that a minimum of 80% of participating staff would voice either high or moderate satisfaction in their experiences.

Involved seniors would also be identified as participants in the project and those total numbers compared

with the numbers of seniors volunteering their time in the past. They would as well be asked to complete the same evaluation survey about their experiences; it would be anticipated that at least 80% of them would provide positive feedback (ratings of high or moderate satisfaction levels) about their efforts (Appendix F). Informal conversations and discussions would also occur during activities, when appropriate.

CHAPTER IV

SOLUTION STRATEGY

Although senior citizens have valuable experiences and knowledge that can be an integral part of instructional programming efforts for children, they are not being used as a resource in the schools at the present time. Although retired citizens have participated in activities in local senior centers and regional senior volunteer programs, they have not been a part of direct support efforts for students in the school district.

Discussion and Evaluation of Solutions

A senior volunteerism project can be an innovative one for the school district; therefore, there are many solutions that are possible for an overall plan in initiating a program. A major priority for this project was to dispel the myths about aging (Langone, 1991). It was this writer's belief that these myths could only become invalid when the direct experience was in contradiction to what was "hearsay": therefore, the intent of this project was to begin to change that perception.

It was also necessary as well to gain administrative and staff support for this senior volunteer program (Lewis, 1978) or, at the very least, gain support from individual staff members interested in such a program. In this effort, the district assessed its needs in relation to a plan; as well, seniors who were spoken to were also asked to identify their own strengths and desires (Biegel, Shore & Gordon, 1984). It was hoped that a "match" between the district's needs and the seniors' strengths could then be made. Recruitment efforts were done in person with groups of seniors. In addition, training opportunities were available (Chambre, 1987) if seniors voiced an interest in an area for which they have minimal, if any, experience or knowledge. A decision to give priority to the support and continued growth of volunteers was made (Schindler-Rainman, 1975).

It was important to interview volunteers and share questions and concerns from both the senior volunteers and participating staff in order to make appropriate placements, clarify misunderstandings and consequently assist in correcting myths and settling fears. The use of an advisory board was considered to generate ideas and act as a problem-solving collaborative to maintain the continuation of senior volunteerism in the schools. It was important as well to educate and inform the potential volunteers about the district's philosophy or mission so that they were able to decide in the very beginning if they wanted to be a part of this organizational effort! Media coverage via newspaper

articles was recommended to serve as a vehicle for communication as well as to show appreciation for the senior volunteers and to assist in future recruitment.

It was hoped that through such a coordinated effort, myths and "horror stories" from other people and districts would be dispelled. In addition, fears about having elder community members in the schools, viewing instruction and programs, would be decreased significantly. If there were strong "connections" made between some seniors and students or staff members, the volunteer program could be expanded and enhanced in the future. Finally, seniors would hopefully gain a broader understanding of how the changes in society have had a direct impact on children and their functioning in school; consequently, the need to look at instruction and schools "with a different eye" would be made more apparent to the seniors. In turn, seniors could realize that the role that they had the opportunity to play within the schools would be of value, not only to them but to the community at large.

Description of Selected Solution

The solution that had been selected combined a variety of ideas and concepts that had been identified and integrated them into a plan that attempted to match the culture of the school district. Only those interested in volunteering as well as having a volunteer was a part of the project; a commitment to be involved in training, if

necessary, was also requested for those staff who were interested in participation. Needs and desires of potential volunteers were to be matched to the placement and the individual personality of the staff member in need of volunteer(s). There was already a commitment by administration in pursuing such an endeavor; many staff members as well had informally expressed excitement with this concept! The project started small and therefore had a greater insurance of success based on a sequential and coordinated plan. When recruitment efforts began, seniors were involved in their volunteer efforts in groups in order for them to feel a sense of comraderie. Transportation was offered, if needed, to insure the seniors safe and regular transportation to the designated school.

Report of Action Taken

During weeks 1 and 2, information about the plan to initiate a senior volunteer program was disseminated to all staff via a district-wide memo (see Appendix A). As a part of this dissemination effort, there was a request to staff in this same memo to formally identify their volunteer needs as well as their willingness to participate as trainers, if necessary, in writing (see Appendix B). The concept was discussed at weekly administration and building-based staff meetings. An article about this effort and the initiation of a new volunteer program was written and published in the local newspaper. This writer was identified as the coordinator of this program.

During week 3, all information and input from the survey was collected and coordinated. A list of participants was developed based on the survey and a written review of all volunteer needs was completed and presented in table format (see Appendix C). This information was then disseminated to all staff voicing an interest in being a part of the project so that they were able to see the needs identified district-wide, including their own as well as others; within this same memo, a status report about the project was also given (see Appendix D).

During weeks 3 and 4, recruitment efforts were begun in the local community. This writer and, on one occasion, the Assistant Principal at one of the schools, made contact and met with senior centers and churches where senior lunches were coordinated and served to discuss the concept of senior volunteerism in the school district. The needs survey that was previously coordinated was disseminated and senior volunteer applications (see Appendix E) were passed out to be completed and asked to be returned, either at that time during the visit or by mail (a stamped self-addressed envelope was included).

During these visits as well, ideas for volunteer positions were also brainstormed and generated through direct discussion with the seniors themselves.

During weeks 5 and 6, there were no applications of interest; recruitment efforts therefore continued. This writer continued to make visits to senior lunches and

community centers for seniors. In addition, however, contact was made with the regional Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) to discuss the district's effort. The coordinator of RSVP requested a copy of our needs survey, so that he could "match" our needs with the identified requests of the seniors who were actively participating in RSVP.

At the end of week 7, no formal applications had yet been received. However, the coordinator from RSVP made contact with this writer, requesting to join forces with our effort to assist with one of the identified needs for our district, that is, a Living History project. This writer and the coordinator then arranged a meeting at a mutually agreeable time to review the logistics of a plan to fulfil that need.

During week 8, this writer met with the planning coordinator at RSVP to review the needs of the Living History project; at least twenty seniros would be needed to be interviewed by students about their experiences during World War II. Amounts of time needed for the interviews, dates and logistics were discussed. Several copies of the Senior Volunteer Assignment form (see Appendix F), completed with information specific to this particular project, were given to the coordinator so that they could be distributed to interested and participating seniors. It was felt that the seniors needed to be aware of the names of the staff members with whom they would work, the content and goals of the project as well as the dates of activities and the name

and phone number of the school where the project would be held.

In week 9, this writer met and coordinated these same specifics with the multi-age team of teachers at the Middle School who had requested senior support for this project. Information was given to these teachers via the Senior Volunteer Assignment forms for staff (see Appendix G), identifying the senior volunteers by name, their phone numbers and any individualized information that might be pertinent (for example, one senior was somewhat anxious around young children), so that groupings could be planned accordingly.

At the end of week 10, the first day of the project was planned; unfortunately, it was a snow day and school had been cancelled. The day was rescheduled for a day during week 11. Seniors were met at the door of the Middle School by this writer, greeted, given a name tag and directed to the team of teachers and students with whom they would work for the day. On that same day, students invited the seniors back for a Living History Day. This writer followed up the students' verbal invitations with a written letter, thanking the seniors for their time and reminding them to save the date for the Living History Day on their calendars (see Appendix H).

One month later (week 15), Living History Day occurred. Students read the biographies of the seniors that they had interviewed, incorporating into these biographies research

as well as the content offered by the seniors during their interviews, and presented the completed works to each senior. Coffee, tea, punch and cookies were available; as well, the Middle School jazz band played Big Band hits for the seniors as an appreciation for their involvement.

On that same day, Project Evaluation Questionnaires (see Appendices I and J) were completed by seniors and participating staff alike, so that assessment information was not lost.

During week 16, all assessment information was compiled. Thank you letters were sent to seniors who participated in the project, as well as the coordinator of RSVP for his time and support.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Senior citizens in local communities have valuable experiences and knowledge that can be an integral component of the total educational experience for children in school. The goal of this project was to increase the participation of seniors in the schools through a planned and coordinated volunteer effort. The purpose of this effort was not only to insure that seniors begin to feel that they are important and valued, but as well for participating staff to recognize the importance of seniors' expertise and experiences in the educational process.

RESULTS

During the first two weeks of the calendar plan, information about the initiation of a senior volunteer program was discussed formally through staff and administration team meetings as well as informally through conversations with community members and parents. A memo was sent to 94 staff district-wide, asking if they were interested in participating in this effort and, if so, what their needs might be (Appendix A). There were many who were

very vocal and supportive of the concept; out of 94 staff members who were invited to participate, 21 expressed formal interest by completing the needs survey (Appendix B). An article about the effort was published in the local newspaper.

When all information and input from the survey was collected, a great deal of interest was generated and documented. Of the twenty one staff members requesting services and contact with seniors, nineteen also offered to be directly involved in training the senior volunteers, if necessary. Survey results ranged from a need for seniors to work individually with students, to requests for seniors to share their expertise and experiences regarding their past job training, hobbies or experiences during historical time periods for example, World War II (Appendix C). Those staff requesting involvement in the project were also willing to take the time to interview seniors in their areas of interest in order to insure that an appropriate "match" between a senior and participating staff member was made. It became quite clear that those staff members who were requesting direct involvement and participation were also willing to take whatever time was necessary to insure that the project was ultimately a successful one. Many were appreciative when the complete needs survey representing the entire district was shared with them (Appendix D).

During the third and fourth weeks of the project, recruitment efforts were begun. The coordinator of this

project visited two senior centers (both on two separate occasions), one church that was offering "Meals on Wheels" lunches and one senior community organization. The project was discussed, the needs survey by the staff was reviewed in order to generate interest, and Volunteer Applications (see Appendix D) were offered, with stamped self-addressed envelopes. During these meetings, the coordinator stressed the need that the public school had for experienced and valuable resources such as seniors. She also asked the seniors to consider preferable areas of volunteerism that they might like to do with either adults in the school or with children: it was explained that the needs survey was not meant to limit the creativity and ideas that could be generated by the seniors themselves!

Although the seniors with whom the coordinator spoke were friendly and cordial, they were also quite honest about the fact that, in their opinions, senior volunteers would be difficult to find. They spoke about their past experiences volunteering within the school system in a neighboring district; they stated that they were not appreciated either by those for or with whom they volunteered. They also expressed the fact they they had just recently donated various appliances to a local Teen Center (specifically, a television and a hot plate) in exchange for the teens assisting them in shoveling their sidewalks during the winter months. They reported that after the appliances were delivered, the teens made no effort at all to assist the

seniors. The seniors felt that they had been used and taken advantage of; they spoke quite openly about the fact that they had, as a result, become "gun shy" about volunteer efforts.

As a result, although disappointing, it was not a surprise when there were no applications completed during Weeks 3 and 4. Recruitment efforts, however, continued. At the end of the seventh week, there were still no individual applications completed. However, a phone call and a personal contact that had been made in Week 4 of the project created some hope: the regional Retired Senior Volunteer Program had reviewed the Needs Survey that had been sent to them and stated that they would like to become involved in one project, that is, a Living History project in Grades 7 and 8 at the Middle School in the school district. Efforts to coordinate that activity were therefore begun.

The Living History Project was proposed by a team of seventh and eighth grade teachers at the Middle School as in interdisciplinary unit to investigate history through the use of interviews as a primary source of research. More specifically, the time period between the years of 1920 through 1950 were to be studied. In language arts classes, since students had already written their own autobiographies, this study was proposed to assist in enriching their knowledge and appreciation of American literature through writing biographies of the seniors themselves. As well, science, medicine, economics and

technologies of this time period would be investigated through the content of the interviews themselves.

After the project was discussed in more depth among the teachers and the coordinator of the Senior Volunteer project, logistics were determined. Approximately 20 senior volunteers were involved for approximately 3 hours on one day. Student groups averaging six in each group (there were 123 students involved) were organized. Teachers were responsible for providing the students with a historical background of the time period 1920-1950 and consequently, brainstorming interview questions used with the seniors. The coordinator was responsible for working with the regional Retired Senior Volunteer Program to coordinate the logistics of the effort itself (i.e., which seniors to be interviewed, the time and place for the interviews, transportation necessary, etc.) as well as be available on that day to answer questions and to assist in modifying the schedule, if necessary.

Through a great deal of on-going communication, the plan was made into a reality. The first proposed day for all interviews to take place had been cancelled due to poor weather. However, the rescheduled day took place with no difficulties: the students were well prepared for their interviews and the seniors were greatly impressed with the depth of the questions asked. They were told on that day that they would be invited back for a Living History Day,

when they would see the completed biographies and be presented with the final copies of the same.

After the interviews, students wrote letters to the town where the senior citizen was born, requesting the town history, which was briefly summarized into the biography itself. Other chapters included: birth and childhood, career, family life and traditions, and the most significant event in history that occurred during that period of history for that person. The students then compiled all information into a book, complete with cover, illustrations and pictures.

Four weeks later, students invited participating seniors to a Living History Day, where the biographies were presented to the participants themselves. In addition, some of the students who were a part of the school's Jazz Band, played Big Band hits from the 1940's while the seniors, participating teachers and students informally spoke among themselves, munching on refreshments. The presentation was videorecorded for the school district as well as the regional Retired Senior Volunteer Program. Seniors who were not available on that day were presented with their autobiographies at an appreciation dinner two nights later that the regional Retired Senior Volunteer Program had coordinated. In addition, several letters of appreciation were written by seniors who were a part of the project, stating their delight and appreciation at having participated in this unit of study.

Evaluative feedback was acquired from both the participating teachers of the team as well as the seniors who had been interviewed. Of those teachers involved, six out of seven teachers stated that they were "most satisfied" with the effort and one teacher stated that she was "moderately satisfied." There were no statements made of dissatisfaction by teachers who had been involved in the project.

Twenty seniors also given an Evaluation Survey: fifteen surveys were returned, eleven designating that they were "most satisfied" with the effort and four feeling "moderately satisfied" about their volunteer time. Once again, no comments that could be considered 'neutral' or expressing dissatisfaction were given.

When suggestions were asked regarding how to improve such a project, teachers suggested that they spend more time planning the project itself among themselves; they felt that the individual team members did not work as well as they might have collaboratively to maximize the use of the seniors' knowledge. Seniors suggested that the date for the Living History Day might have been designated on the day that they had been interviewed in order to have planned to participate (obviously, this feedback was from who were not able to attend that day). When the seniors were spoken to more informally about volunteer participation on a more regular basis, they stated that their schedules were filled with commitments to family, friends and service

organizations (hospitals, etc.). They also stated that they preferred to regularly volunteer closer to their homes, which were also closer to public transportation stops as well as other personal contacts, in case of an emergency. They prefaced these remarks, however, with additional positive commentary about their experiences with this Living History project!

Discussion

Clearly, the original intent of this project was not realized as had been hoped; however, a successful single project had been implemented within the planned effort itself. Barriers cited in the literature that were felt to be detrimental to a successful volunteer project had been carefully analyzed and incorporated into the plan in order to insure success. However, the attitudes of the potential senior volunteers themselves (a variable not found within the literature review) had a direct impact on their participation; that is, negative experiences in other situations in the past had created feelings of dissatisfaction with school volunteerism. As a result, senior volunteer participation on a regular basis was not to become a reality at this time.

Recommendations

It is felt that this effort should therefore be regarded as the "first phase" in an overall senior or perhaps comprehensive volunteer plan for the entire district. Perhaps the success of one short project will

engage a few more seniors to participate in the public schools within areas that they feel comfortable and appreciated, as they had for this Living History unit. For such a senior volunteer project, there needs to be continued time and effort placed into this plan, so that steps can be accomplished toward a much larger goal one-by-one.

It is also felt that the sequence that was used, the steps that were taken in a very systematic way and the communication that was done throughout the project could be used as a model for a larger more comprehensive volunteer project in the school district, involving not only seniors but as well, parents, college students, businesses or independent land owners. It may be only then that seniors as well as others who might not have previously been involved in school-wide activities will be seen with children regularly in the public schools, assisting them, serving as their mentors and channeling knowledge and energies back and forth to each other so that all may benefit.

Dissemination

The sequence of activities, forms and results of this practicum have been the foundation for organizing a much more comprehensive volunteer effort in the schools than the one we currently have. During recent School Board and Budget Information meetings, community members have voiced concern about the need to better organize and train our current volunteers more effectively. Volunteers themselves have also expressed concern about their skills not being

used to the fullest. They have stated that teachers with whom they volunteer oftentimes have wanted help but have not provided the training necessary to maximize their assistance to them. The philosophy of the Senior Volunteer effort as well as the forms for involvement and communication have already been discussed at length and have become the skeleton to strengthen and expand our current volunteer effort to all factions of the school and community.

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APPENDIX A

Initial Letter
Request to Identify Needs

M E M O R A N D U M

TO: All K-8 Staff

FROM: Vanessa C. Phelan
Director of Special Services

RE: Senior Volunteerism

Recently, I have had many brief discussions with several people regarding the possible recruitment of retired folks and/or "seniors" to be an intrinsic part of our K-8 programming efforts in some capacity. We know several things about this population specific to volunteerism:

1. retirees have skills and experiences that can be used <u>if</u> those skills are matched to specific needs.
2. seniors or retirees can serve as an inspiration to young people.
3. seniors can gain a great deal of emotional strength and security by giving their time and strengths to others.
4. retired people can improve school and community relations as well as to improve the quality of life for themselves.

I would like to try and pursue this effort district-wide, with your help (of course!) Attached is a questionnaire for you to complete if you are interested in acquiring the services and support from a senior volunteer. Although specific areas have been designated, please feel free to add more under "other" if you have any good ideas! You will see as well that there is an area for you to volunteer <u>your</u> time in training activities, <u>should</u> there be a need.

I will be attempting to do some initial recruiting in the next few weeks; therefore, if you are interested in this project, please return the "Request for Senior Volunteer Services" form to me as soon as possible.

Thanks!

APPENDIX B

Request for Senior
Volunteer Services

Request for Senior Volunteer Services

Name: _____

School: _____ Grade: _____

A. In what areas are you interested in utilizing a senior volunteer?

_____ Tutoring
Subjects? _____
_____ Read stories to children
_____ Make instructional materials
_____ Go on field trips
_____ Assist individual children

Areas? _____

_____

Child's Name: _____
_____ Clerical tasks
_____ Computer assistance
_____ Discuss particular areas of expertise
_____ Other:

_____

_____

_____

B. Description of volunteer desired (qualities, characteristics or special skills desired).

_____

_____

_____

Is this on a regular basis _____
Or one-time basis _____

C. Please indicate your preference as to days and hours.

Days _____ Hours _____

D. The volunteer will come in for an interview with you before beginning. When is this convenient?

Day _____ Hour _____

(over)

E. Would <u>you</u> be willing to assist in any training activities for the senior volunteers should this be necessary? yes ——— no ———

Areas? _____

_____

* We will ask the senior volunteers to be careful and <u>not</u> volunteer more time than they are able to give. Dependability and a spirit of helpfulness are just as important as a specific talent.

* Please note: "Make Work" will have no part in this program. If a senior is placed with you and you are unable to use his/her help at any time, it will be your responsibility to notify him/her.

_____ _____

Teacher's Signature Date

APPENDIX C

Senior Volunteer
Needs Survey

SENIOR VOLUNTEER NEEDS SURVEY

Coordinator: Vanessa Phelan
(878-9057)

Activity	Grade Level	Time Period	Interview	Contact
Special Projects/ Reading to Child	K	2x/week	11:45-12:30 anyday after 3:30	Nancy Nye
Read to Children/ Complete Book Club Slips	1	Tues 9:30 AM and/or Thurs 9 AM	Wed 12:45	Maryanne Robinson
Read Stories/ Special Projects	K-1	3-5x/week afternoons	Mon or Wed afternoon	Alice McNeish
Previewing Historical Fiction Book with Children - Make and Play Learning Games - Reading to Children - Clerical	K-2	Making materials anytime 7 AM - 6 PM Reading/playing learning games: 9:15-10 AM (T, Th) or 10:15-11 AM (T, Th) or 1:30-2 PM (any afternoon)	Wed/Thurs 7:30 AM Mon - Fri after 3 PM	Barb Chapin
Assisting Children During Art Classes	3-5	Anytime on a regular basis	Tues/Wed after 3 PM	Ellie Morency
Assist Individual Children in Reading, Math, Writing	3-5	Anytime that is convenient on a regular basis	Fri 2 PM or after	Donna Dulaney
Craft Projects/ Reading to Children	K-2	Mon-Fri mornings anytime; Thurs/Fri afternoons anytime (regular schedule)	Mon 11:30 AM Tues 11:30 AM	Linda McKenna

Activity	Grade Level	Time Period	Interview	Contact
Demonstrations of Playing any Instruments to Groups of Students' - Answering Questions of Students	3-5	One-time basis, anytime that is convenient (for 10-30 min.)	Tues 9:30-11AM	Sandi MacLeod
*Eating with Small Groups of Students in the Cafeteria - Playing Games or Reading Stories in the Cafeteria	3-5	Anytime (but preferably on a regular basis)	Anytime	Katie Kelley
Playing Math Games with Individual Children	2	Tues, Wed, Thurs 1:45-2:30 one day a week	Mon-Fri 12:10-1:10	Alicia Shanks
Playing Math Games, Scrabble with Children	3	Wed or Fri, 12:45-1:15 and/or 2:00-2:45	Anytime, 3:45 PM or after	Edwina Leahey
Making Instructional Materials, Reading Stories to Children and/or Tutoring	K-1	Tues 12:30-1:30/2 PM	Tues 3:30 Thurs 12:30	Jane Mitchell
Speaking about Personal Experiences Regarding Past Historical Events	7-8	Anytime	Anytime	Ann Messier Don Villemaire Sue Carlson

*Free lunch will be provided!

Activity	Grade Level	Time Period	Interview	Contact
Share Knowledge and Memories of WWII via Students' Interviews (see attached sheet)	6-8	Flexible options: (see letter) Project over 3 weeks in Feb. (between 12 - 1:30, M,T or W) one meeting per week with small group of students	Anyday 2:30 and on	Jane Vossler
Assistance in Learning Center (Library)	6-8	Anytime that is convenient	Anyday between 9 - 2 PM	Al Quittner/ Joan McNichol
Covering Telephones During Meeting - Typing- Computer/Word Processing Assistance - Sharing Expertise in Above Areas	Superintendent's Office Anytime that is convenient		Flexible	Lauretta Martin Helen Irwin
Playing Math Games - Helping Students with Arts and Crafts Projects - Finger Painting - Perhaps Some Cooking	K-1	Thurs or Fri 9:45-10:45 AM	Thurs or Fri between 11-12:00	Janet Bowker

Grades K-2 - Essex Elementary School, Browns River Road, Essex

Grades 3-5 - Founders Memorial School, Sandhill Road, Essex

Grades 6-8 - Essex Middle School, Foster Road, Essex

APPENDIX D

Information and Project
Update to Interested Staff

M E M O R A N D U M

TO: All Those Interested in Senior Volunteerism

Nancy Nye	Mary Ann Robinson	Jane Vossler
Alice McNeish	Barbara Chapin	Joan McNichol
Ellie Morency	Donna Dulaney	Helen Irwin
Linda McKenna	Sandi MacLeod	Al Quittner
Katie Kelley	Alicia Shanks	Lauretta Martin
Edwina Leahey	Jane Mitchell	Janet Bowker

FROM: Vanessa C. Phelan
Director of Special Services

RE: Senior Volunteer Needs Survey Information

DATE: January 17, 1992

Thank you all for your interest in senior volunteerism as well as the information that you had completed and submitted specific to the needs that senior volunteers might be able to meet in your schools. Since you had expressed an interest and went to the trouble of completing the information, I thought that I would provide for you the information that was collected district-wide. As you can see from the attached list, there are a number as well as a variety of options for seniors to participate in...now all we need is the seniors!

For your information as well, recruitment efforts for these needs have started out more slowly then I had originally anticipated. I had visited one senior organization and they have been somewhat resistant to participate since they had been "burned" from schools in the past. As a result, I spent most of that session simply talking and doing public relations with individuals within the group itself, hoping that this would perhaps lay a foundation for participation in the near future. I have also set up a meeting with the regional senior group next week; since this is a much larger group, I hope to begin to get more folks who will begin participation in any one or more of these areas (wish me luck)!

Thanks again for your interest and participation; I will keep you updated as time goes on.

APPENDIX E

Senior Volunteer Applications

Volunteer Application

Name: _____

Address: _____

_____

Phone: _____

Work Experience: _____

_____

Hobbies/Special Skills: _____

_____

_____ _____

I wish to work in:

- ☐ Essex Elementary School (Grades Preschool-2)
- ☐ Founders Memorial School (Grades 3-5)
- ☐ Essex Middle School (Grades 6-8)

Do you have transportation? Yes ☐ No ☐

Primary areas of interest (check as many as you like).

___ tutoring

___ read to children/have children read to you

___ work with individuals or small groups in special projects

___ go on field trips

___ provide clerical assistance

___ offer computer assistance

___ work on the playground

___ make instructional games

___ offer expertise in _____

___ other: _____

_____

(over)

Days and times available:

Hour	8	9	10	11	12	1	2	3	4
Monday									
Tuesday									
Wednesday									
Thursday									
Friday									

Are there any health concerns that we should be aware of? _____

_____

_____

YOU WILL BE CONTACTED FOR AN INTERVIEW!

THANK YOU!

_____ _____

signature date

APPENDIX F

Senior Volunteer Assignment Forms
(for Seniors)

SENIOR VOLUNTEER ASSIGNMENT

Date: _____

To Volunteer _____:

The staff member you will be working with is _____ who is a _____ at the _____School. The telephone number at the school is _____ and at home is _____.

If you are unable to report on your scheduled day for any reason, please notify the staff member promptly.

It is his/her responsibility to notify you if, any date, she/he does not need your assistance.

Thank you so much! We appreciate what you are doing. Please do not hesitate to call me if you have any need.

Vanessa C. Phelan
Director of Special Services

APPENDIX G

Senior Volunteer Assignment Forms
(for Staff)

To: _____ Date: _____
(staff member)

SENIOR VOLUNTEER ASSIGNMENT

Name: _____

Address: _____ Phone: _____

Day(s) to Work: _____

Additional Information: _____

_____

_____

It is your responsibility to notify your senior anytime you do not need his/her assistance.

It is the senior's responsibility to notify you if she/he is unable to meet the schedule.

As always, please let me know if you have any concerns about this senior volunteer arrangement. Thanks!

Vanessa C. Phelan
Director of Special Services

APPENDIX H

Letter of Appreciation
to Participating Seniors

April 25, 1992

!first! !last!
!address!

Dear !first!:

Although this is a late in coming letter of appreciation, it is nevertheless quite sincere! Thank you for taking the time to be interviewed and to speak with our eighth grade students at the Essex Middle School last month. If you remember, the students are in the process of writing a biographical essay about you and your experiences. With this in mind, we would ask that you reserve the afternoon of May 15, 1992 (from approximately 1 PM to 2:15 PM) in order to join us in an "appreciation tea" so that you could review the essays that the students wrote first hand!

The eighth grade team of teachers will be confirming this get-together with you through their own personal invitation. We all certainly appreciate the time that you have taken to share your experiences and knowledge with our students. We hope to see you soon!

Sincerely yours,

Vanessa C. Phelan
Director of Special Services

VCP/ahi

cc: Barbara Velasquez, Eighth Grade Spirit Team
Frank Foley, RSVP

APPENDIX I

Senior Project
Evaluation Questionnaire

SENIOR PROJECT EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE

Name of Participating Staff Member:

Name of Senior Volunteer:

Assigned Job of Senior Volunteer:

Please circle the most appropriate number for the following questions:

1. What is your level of satisfaction with the initial phases of this senior volunteer effort?

5	4	3	2	1
most satisfied	moderately satisfied	no opinion	somewhat dissatisfied	not satisfied

2. Do you feel that your needs were met in the match that was made between you and your senior volunteer?

5	4	3	2	1
most satisfied	moderately satisfied	no opinion	somewhat dissatisfied	not satisfied

(over)

3. What suggestions would you offer to help us improve and expand upon this partnership between seniors and the school district

Thanks!

APPENDIX J

Staff Project
Evaluation Survey

STAFF PROJECT EVALUATION SURVEY

Name of Participating Staff Member:

Name of Senior Volunteer:

Assigned Job of Senior Volunteer:

Please circle the most appropriate number for the following questions:

1. What is your level of satisfaction with the initial phases of this senior volunteer effort?

5	4	3	2	1
most satisfied	moderately satisfied	no opinion	somewhat dissatisfied	not satisfied

2. Do you feel that your needs were met in the match that was made between you and your senior volunteer?

5	4	3	2	1
most satisfied	moderately satisfied	no opinion	somewhat dissatisfied	not satisfied

(over)

3. What suggestions would you offer to help us improve and expand upon this partnership between seniors and the school district?

Thanks!

APPENDIX K

Letters of Appreciation

RECEIVED MAY 8 1992

May 5th, 1992

Ms. Vanessa C. Phelan
Director of Special Services
Essex Town School District
91 Allen Martin Drive
Essex Junction, VT 05452

Dear Vanessa:

It is with a great deal of disappointment that I write to tell you that I will not be able to accept your May 15th invitation. Unfortunately, my wife and I are going down to New York City that weekend, and are leaving early that same morning.

I would very much like to have the opportunity to reveiew the essay some time, and if you can arrange that I would appreciate it.

I can't begin to tell you how wonderful it was to share my experiences with the students and hope that they enjoyed learning about World War II in this way equally as well. I personally feel that learning in this fashion is valuable and you and the administration are to be commended for being so open to teaching in this manner.

I hope I will see you and the students again.

Sincerely,

Henry Golovin
2 Southview Drive
So. Burlington, VT 05403

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